

Richard Kozlow's lithographs and paintings on bullfighting extract the essence of the drama and the ritual of movement without over-sentimentalizing the sport. The artist from Birmingham attended bullfights while living in Mexico and Spain.

Bull fighting: a ballet of death

By Corinne Abett
staff writer

Richard and Lois Kozlow of Birmingham are still a little awed by the reception in Madrid to his lithographs and paintings on bull fighting. An American taking bull fight art to Spain is as audacious as taking canoe paddles to the Indians or fishing rods to the Eskimos.

But, then, Kozlow is as much international personality and artist as he is hometown painter.

When he and his family lived in both Mexico and Spain, he had an opportunity to study bull fighting and the elaborate ritual surrounding it as an objective, keen-eyed observer.

The show, sponsored by the U.S. government, was held at the U.S. Cultural Center in Madrid.

ing the moments just before the opening reception when they weren't certain if anyone would show up.

But the crowd was sizeable, and unlike those at openings here, Kozlow said many who came were involved in bull fighting.

Kozlow recalled with a smile the woman art reviewer who is married to a bull fighter.

"She stood in front of each painting for a long time. Then she told me she was so surprised. Everything was correct, the moves, the passes, everything. She said it was like going to the corrida. Like spending the afternoon at the corrida."

Corrida de toros is the Spanish phrase for the bull fight.

That and other favorable comments created Kozlow's fears.

Particularly interesting is that this artist has depicted this most colorful of events in black and white.

WHILE RESIDING in Spain, the Kozlows lived near the bull ring, so he had opportunities to see the spectacle. But this was one of the few trips when he didn't take pack art supplies.

"Most of the time when we go away, I pack my brushes and acrylics, but this time I didn't. Over here the acrylics are not very good, so I bought a large jar of tempera. I don't even paint with tempera. Then, all of a sudden, I was painting bull fighting in tempera — a forgiving medium that added a whole new thing."

Saying that death is the central theme of the bull fight, Kozlow said, "It is really a Spanish experience, really a Latin experience." He added that most Americans don't understand bull fighting and the traditions and ritualistic choreography that are part of it.

His black and white paintings and suite of four lithographs seem to extract the essence of the drama, the ritual of historically dictated movement

and line, right down to the flow of blood and the angle of the lance without over-sentimentalizing or becoming maudlin.

THE BULL FIGHT has been painted on velvet, done in mass-produced art in garish color, and occasionally painted by masterful artists. But the purity of Kozlow's black and white separates emotion from truth, putting this ballet of death in non-judgmental perspective.

The suite of four lithographs was purchased by the Taurine Museum as well as the National Library of Spain, which has an outstanding graphics collection.

He is now on another series of paintings which he would only say are also very serious.

Kozlow, known in this country primarily as a landscape painter, continues to do these, too, but he is also moving into many other areas for his subject matter.

"I MUST ADMIT I was a little apprehensive," said Kozlow, remember-

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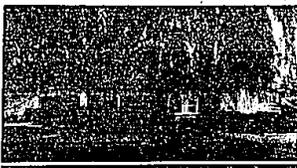
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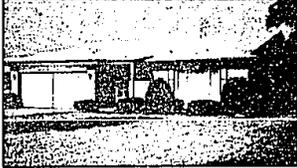
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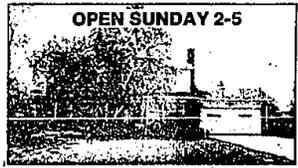
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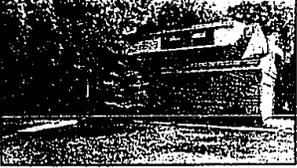
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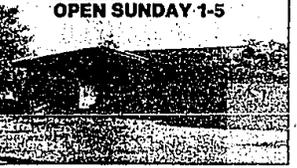
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